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By now it shouldn't be surprising that the United States Congress is lurching – slowly – into the 21st century when it comes to the Internet.

After all, the Senate still doesn't require its members to file their personal financial information online and there are many parts of the Capitol where you can't get wireless connection.

This past week House leaders got involved in the debate over whether to allow lawmakers to communicate with their constituents on the ever-growing list of Web sites where people share videos every day.

Both chambers have strict rules about how lawmakers can disseminate information. The idea is to have a clear firewall between official business – paid for by the taxpayers – and political activity that is paid for by those who donate to lawmakers' campaigns.

So when a House member or senator sends out a newsletter, you won't find any solicitations for campaign contributions. They're not even allowed to ask you to vote for their re-election.

But communication between lawmakers and their constituents has gone way beyond the quarterly newsletter. They all have Web sites and want to be able to post video so they can show constituents what they do and not just tell them about it.

Congressional rules say members can only put official Senate and House video on their Web sites and can't link to the dozens of sites where people share video – most notably on YouTube.

If a lawmaker embeds some video from YouTube (identifiable by the YouTube logo) on his or her site – even if it's just of them being interviewed on a news show – it violates the rules.

Now as far as I know there aren't any Internet police on Capitol Hill who are hauling away lawmakers who do this – and I'm told more than 100 on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers routinely do.

Both Reps. John Campbell and Dana Rohrabacher, for example, have at times put YouTube video on their sites.

I talked to Campbell, R-Irvine, about this and he has recently found a way to reprocess the videos so they are now appearing on his site sans YouTube logo.

But he, like many others lawmakers, says he just wants to be able to communicate better with his constituents and doesn't see the need for such angst about the free flow of information on the Internet. Campbell was the first Orange County House member do a blog. Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach, now has one,too.

For some time, Senate Rules and House Administration committees have been trying to figure out how to rewrite the rules to bring their chambers into the modern age.

The proposal in the House, from Rep. Michael Capuano, D-Mass., who chairs the commission that regulates mailing standards for members, was to allow video only on sites approved by the House as a way of making sure official business wasn't being put on sites with advertising – whether political or commercial.

Well that got Republican Minority Leader John Boehner upset and he dashed off a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi – which he blasted out to all of us. He said that what Capuano wants to do is "effectively shut down what has emerged as a free and helpfully uncensored pipeline of real-time information between the American people and their elected leaders.'

Capuano fired back with a statement calling such talk "laughably inaccurate" and said his group wants to make it easier, not harder to get video posted.

This stuff simmered for a couple of days until finally Pelosi posted a letter on her Web site basically saying everyone should calm down; that they'll figure something out.

"Like many other members," Pelosi wrote, "I have a blog, use YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, Digg and other new media to communicate with constituents, and I believe they are vital tools toward increasing transparency and accountability."

In the Senate, Sen. Dianne Feinstein's Rules Committee has been working on a way to make this work.

They're worried about mingling ads with official Senate content and they also want to make sure that someone who gives a senator some private information doesn't learn later that that the data has been sold.

Some lawmakers are talking about having a separate advertising-free portion of YouTube for example. They are also considering creating a special congressional logo so that when someone goes to a video sharing site they know whether they're looking at something official from their lawmaker or a parody or a shadow site someone else created.

The Senate seems poised to get something done in the next few weeks, I'm told. The time frame in the House seems less certain.

We'll be watching.

WHAT YOU SAID

Two weeks ago we asked which candidate you thought would do best in capturing the Latino vote this fall. Forty-eight percent said Obama, 32 percent said McCain and 21 percent said they thought the two candidates would split the Latino vote.

Many people commented that what both candidates need to concentrate on is the problem of illegal immigration.